Background
Two of the biggest concerns facing rural communities in the Intermountain West today are the contrasting problems of rapid growth and development as opposed to economic decline and stagnation. Communities confronting either of these problems must deal with many challenges.

For many of Utah’s rural communities, the problem of either growth or decline has been compounded by dependency on public lands and the changing perceptions by the general public of how these lands should be used. Utah communities whose economies have revolved around farming, ranching, and extraction of natural resources have depended upon access to and use of public lands, but use of these lands for tourism, recreation, wildlife habitat, military operations, and other public purposes have increased user competition and decision making conflicts. Planning for the future of their communities is difficult as decision-makers face changing and increasingly diverse public perceptions about public resource issues. The viability and sustainability of many rural communities depends upon their ability to harmonize their traditional uses of these lands with new economic opportunities.

Recreation and tourism are important components of Utah’s contemporary economy. For some of Utah’s rural communities, recreation and tourism have brought about rapid growth and its associated concerns. Other communities in Utah, especially those facing stagnation or decline, have attempted to develop recreation and tourism opportunities in their area as a means of diversifying their economies, while at the same time attempting to maintain traditional forms of employment. Still other communities are wary of embracing recreation and tourism at all, out of concern for the changes associated with them.

Purpose
The purposes of this project were to identify strategies used by rural communities to successfully cope with concerns related to rapid growth or stagnation and decline, and to look at the role recreation and tourism has played in those strategies. We were also interested in understanding what those communities have done to make recreation and tourism compatible with other economic activities, and what tactics they have drawn upon to preserve a small town atmosphere and the characteristics that make their communities unique. We hope that understanding the success of these strategies will help other rural communities facing similar circumstances to integrate tourism and recreation into their economies and to avoid some of the economic and social pitfalls that can be associated with such change.

Sign on the road to Springdale, one of the study sites.
Research Design

Study Sites
This project examined four rural Utah communities: Escalante, Randolph, Springdale, and Vernal. Escalante, Randolph and Vernal have attempted to diversify their economies with recreation and tourism development, while maintaining other important areas of their economies such as agriculture, ranching, mineral extraction, manufacturing and other related services. Springdale’s economy is based primarily upon recreation and tourism, but continues to include a small amount of agriculture. Many of its residents commute to jobs in nearby communities.

Springdale and Vernal have experienced rapid growth in the past, but the trend has slowed significantly. Both are presently growing, but at a more manageable pace. Escalante and Randolph have experienced stagnation and decline. However, due to the designation of a national monument on federal lands adjoining the community, Escalante has the potential for experiencing rapid growth.

Five criteria were used to select each of the four study communities: 1) close proximity to state or federal lands, and, consequently, an ability to attract tourists and recreationists to use that land; 2) a diverse economy which includes at least some tourism, or the community was attempting to encourage tourism to help diversify its economy; 3) an attempt had been made to maintain the community’s rural atmosphere and unique characteristics through local land-use ordinances, regulations, and land acquisition programs aimed at conserving and preserving natural resources and cultural heritage; 4) a population of less than 10,000 people, and location in a non-metropolitan county; and, 5) an existing master plan or the community was in the process of developing a plan for the future.

Data Collection
“Chain-referral” sampling was used to identify people to interview in each community. One or more key individuals within the community were located, interviewed, and then asked to name others who would be knowledgeable respondents for the study. Individuals interviewed included: political leaders (mayors, city council members, county commissioners, planning and zoning committee members, and board of adjustment members); business leaders (Chamber of Commerce presidents and members, real estate development interests, and owners of local businesses, especially those related to tourism and recreation); public land managers; and, city employees (planners and managers). In-depth interviews were conducted with at least 10 individuals in each community. The interviews were designed to encourage open-ended discussion guided by a standard protocol of interview questions. The use of open-ended questions and a conversational format allowed respondents the opportunity to elaborate on those areas in which they had the most knowledge and expertise, and to decline answering questions on which they did not feel qualified to comment. A qualitative approach was used to analyze themes in the data.

The main topics addressed during the interviews included:

- an assessment of the community’s past and present economic activities;
- their community’s planning process, including the motivation behind it, who was responsible for creating and implementing it, and how those responsible solicited citizen involvement;
- strategies used to integrate tourism and recreation into the economy and life-style of the community and what type of social and economic concerns the community encountered as a result of the integration;
- strategies used to maintain the community’s unique characteristics and rural atmosphere;
- types of conflicts commonly encountered by the community pertaining to growth and economic diversification, and how residents have or are trying to manage them;
- sources of government aid and funding used;
- recommendations for other communities in similar situations.

Key Findings
The four communities used in this research either already have, or are in the process of, integrating tourism and recreation into their economies. The two communities that have had the most time and experience with this process, Vernal and Springdale, also appear to have been the most successful in this undertaking. (“Success,” for the purpose of this study, is measured by the extent to which tourism and recreation plays a role in the community’s economy, while at the same time the town has maintained its integrity and uniqueness.) After Vernal suffered through an oil bust in the 1980s, its leaders created a future vision that involved ensuring the community would no longer be reliant on one industry, and they have succeeded in making this vision a reality. Vernal’s economy is the most diverse of the four study communities, incorporating energy extraction industries, retail trade, a few manufacturing companies, and tourism and recreation.

Springdale’s leaders, on the other hand, set their visions on something entirely different. They are the gateway to Zion National Park and receive the most visitors, yet they have been the most successful at keeping the integrity of their community intact. They have been very careful about passing regulations that will ensure Springdale retains its rural character and natural amenities, despite thousands of visitors each year and significant development in the surrounding area.
In both these communities, the leaders and decision makers within the community had a vision for the future. They did more than just put together a plan for their community; they had foresight into what would help their communities thrive and then they developed a plan to make that happen. Researchers in community development have stressed the importance of a community creating a vision and a plan for the future, and these two communities are evidence of how this element contributes to a successful community strategy.

Another important element in determining how successful a community will be in its development efforts is that individuals within leadership positions are able to devote time, knowledge, and skills to move their community in a positive direction both economically and socially. In all four of the study communities, city and town officials are volunteers and the majority of them work full-time in another occupation. While this poses a serious problem for Escalante and Randolph, it is not a significant concern for officials in Springdale and Vernal, who secured funding to hire two full-time staff persons to work on managing and planning for their communities’ future. This, in turn, resulted in the communities having much better knowledge of and access to funding and programming geared toward assisting rural communities in their development efforts. Also, attitudes of community leaders in Vernal and Springdale tend to be more positive about the future of their communities, and those leaders appear to be more active in making plans for the future than leaders in either Randolph or Escalante.

A third element in community development strategies that is deemed important by researchers is “community capacity.” This has been defined as the ability of various factors within a community to promote well-being among residents, and to enable a community to pull through hard times. Community capacity consists of four components: physical capital, human capital, social capital, and capital goods. Particularly important to rural communities is the “physical capital” component, which is defined to include the physical elements and resources found within a community (e.g., sewer systems, open space, business parks, housing stock, schools, etc.), as well as the financial capital or revenue the community is able to generate. Our results suggest that physical capital must be in place before a community’s well-being can be completely realized. In all four of the study communities, housing affordability and availability were a serious concern for community leaders at one time. In two communities, the availability of water was also a significant problem. Housing concerns can be addressed through a change in zoning and building ordinances, but water scarcity is a more difficult problem to solve, and needs further research.

**Strategies for Managing and Planning for the Future**

While communities are unique, this research has identified a few common strategies used by community leaders in their efforts to successfully diversify their economies and integrate tourism and recreation. The first is that it is important for a community to have a vision for the future. Community leaders and residents in all four of our study communities had taken the time to develop a master plan. Without this first step, it is difficult for a community to know which strategies will be most effective in helping them to implement their vision.

Secondly, leaders within these four communities recognized the importance of citizen involvement in the planning process. They solicited and received involvement through the formation of committees that they felt truly represented their residents. They also conducted resident surveys to gain a better understanding of their citizens’ preferences. Through this type of citizen engagement, community leaders felt they not only developed better plans, but also that community residents had a better understanding and acceptance of their city’s master plan.

Lastly, the community leaders recognized their own limitations, and hired outside consultants to aid them in their planning process, which included help with writing planning documents and also with conducting resident surveys. By receiving assistance from experts in the field of community development, most of the respondents felt they had done a much better and more thorough job on the planning process than if they had attempted to do it on their own. In addition to helping in the planning process, the consultants could also serve as mediators in managing community conflicts. In recognition of the importance of these outside consultants, federal, state, and county governments, as well as some private organizations, have developed funding sources to assist communities in paying the costs of professional consultants. A partial list of those organizations may be found on the next page.
### State Programs
- **Utah Department of Community and Economic Development**
  324 South State Street, Suite 500
  Salt Lake City, UT 84111
  Phone: (801) 538-8700
  Web: deed.utah.gov/

- **The Governor’s Rural Partnership Office**
  21st Century Communities
  355 West Center Street
  Cedar City, UT 84720
  Phone: (435) 586-7738
  Web: utahreach.usu.edu

- **Utah Center for Rural Life**
  Southern Utah University
  351 West Center Street
  Cedar City, UT 84720
  Phone: (435) 586-7852
  Web: utahreach.usu.edu

- **Utah Rural Development Council**
  50 South 600 East, Suite 150
  Salt Lake City, UT 84102
  Phone: (801) 328-1601
  Web: www.ulct.org/

- **Utah League of Cities and Towns**
  295 N. Jimmy Doolittle Road
  Salt Lake City, UT 84116
  Phone: (801) 292-4469
  Web: www.wfrc.org/

### Regional Programs
- **Wasatch Front Regional Council**
  295 N. Jimmy Doolittle Road
  Salt Lake City, UT 84116
  Phone: (801) 292-4469
  Web: www.wfrc.org/
  Counties: Weber, Morgan, Davis, Salt Lake, and Tooele

- **Six County Association of Governments**
  250 North Main
  Richfield, UT 84701
  Phone: (435) 896-9222
  Web: www.sixcounty.com/
  Counties: Juab, Millard, Sevier, Sanpete, Piute, and Wayne

- **Uintah Basin Association of Governments**
  855 East 200 North
  Roosevelt, UT 84066
  Phone: (435) 722-4518
  Counties: Daggett, Duchesne, and Uintah

- **Mountainland Association of Governments**
  586 East 800 North
  Orem, UT 84097-4146
  Phone: (801) 229-3800
  Web: www.mountainland.org
  Counties: Summit, Utah, and Wasatch

- **Bear River Association of Governments**
  170 North Main
  Logan, UT 84321
  Phone: (435) 752-7242
  Web: www.brags.dst.ut.us/
  Counties: Box Elder, Cache, and Rich

- **Five County Association of Governments**
  906 North 1400 West
  St. George, UT 84771-1550
  Phone: (435) 673-3548
  Web: www.fcaog.state.ut.us/
  Counties: Beaver, Iron, Garfield, Kane, and Washington

### Federal Programs
- **USDA Rural Development**
  Stop 0705, 1400 Independence Avenue SW
  Washington, D.C. 20250-0705
  Phone: (202) 720-4323
  Web: www.rurdev.usda.gov

- **Economic Action Programs**
  USDA Forest Service
  Federal Bldg. 234 25th Street
  Ogden, UT 84401
  Phone: (801) 625-5259
  Web: www.fs.fed.us/r6/coop/programs/rca/economic

- **Community Development Financial Institution Funds**
  U.S. Department of Treasury
  601 Thirteenth Street NW, Suite 200 South
  Washington, D.C. 20005
  Phone: (202) 622-8662
  Web: www.cdfifund.gov/

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